DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 297 110 CE 050 600

TITLE The Dropout Dilemma: Searching for Formulas That Work.
INSTITUTION Texas State Council on Vocational Education, Austin.
PUB DATE Jun 88
NOTE 12p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Dropout Characteristics; *Dropout Prevention; *Dropout Programs; *Educational Needs; Educational Strategies; Elementary Secondary Education; High Risk Students; Position Papers; Program Content; *School Role; Statewide Planning; *Vocational Education
IDENTIFIERS *Texas

ABSTRACT

It is the position of the Texas Council on Vocational Education that students at high risk of dropping out of school need an instructional approach that is comprehensive, individualized, and caring. Vocational education provides an important learning alternative that can serve as a powerful component of dropout prevention and recovery programs. In Texas, the cost of dropping out is estimated at $17.12 billion in foregone income, lost tax revenue, unemployment insurance, adult training and education, and the increased cost of crime and welfare. Common elements of dropout prevention programs that work are parental involvement and support, strong administrators and teachers, a focus on the individual and on building self-esteem, provision of an array of supportive services, and broad-based partnerships. Model methods that work include starting early, mentoring, intergenerational programs, year-round schooling, alternative programs, and schools-within-schools. For its part, vocational education can help prevent at-risk students from dropping out of school by making high-risk students aware of vocational education and recruiting them into vocational programs, providing extensive career exploration and job-specific skill training, and offering work-study activities. (MN)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

W Reece

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

The Dropout Dilemma

Searching For Formulas That Work

Position Statment of
The Texas Council on
Vocational Education
P.O. Box 1886, Austin, Texas
78767
512-463-5490

June 1988

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Will Reece

RESEARCH ASSOCIATE
Pamela Peters

CHAIRMAN
George F. Malott
Austin

VICE CHAIRMAN
William E. Zinsmeyer
San Antonio

MEMBERS

Gary O. Boren
Chairman, 1986-87
Lubbock

Hank S. Brown
San Antonio

Shirlene S. Cook
Beaumont

John C. Cox
Houston

Jim N. Hutchins
Estelline

Helen Soto Knaggs
Austin

Filomena Leo
La Joya

Ted Martinez, Jr.
Dallas

Joe Pentony
Houston

Donna Price
Houston

Talmadge D. Steinke
Waco

This paper was developed under the direction and guidance of **Janey Lack**, Texas Council on Vocational Education: Member 1983-88, Chairman 1985-86.

The Dropout Dilemma:

Searching for Formulas that Work

The Issue

The current rate of dropping out of school constitutes a national -- and a Texas -- crisis. *Texas ranks 41st among all the states in its ability to retain students in school through graduation. One out of every three (and in some areas, one out of every two) Texas ninth-graders drops out of high school before finishing. In both economic and human terms, these numbers are a tragedy.*

This document is a position statement to discuss the status of the dropout problem and to suggest ways to ameliorate it.

In this paper, a dropout is defined as an individual without a high school diploma or GED, who is not currently enrolled in school.

The Recommendation

We believe that reaching the population in need requires an approach that is COMPREHENSIVE, INDIVIDUALIZED, and CARING. Learning opportunities must be provided as early as possible -- for educationally disadvantaged children, *before* the start of kindergarten. The teaching environment must be broadened to address the multiplicity of needs faced by the at-risk student. Support must not only start early, but must be sustained through the entire school career.

Recognizing that no single approach will work in all locations or for all students, a successful plan needs to incorporate a variety of methods and programs.

Vocational education provides an important learning alternative. We recommend that it be viewed as a powerful component of dropout prevention and recovery programs.

"Who" Drops Out and "Why"

The potential dropout has been written about in a number of recent and well-documented studies. These studies identify the factors that place a student "at risk" and discuss the behavior patterns that typically signal dropping out. The bank of knowledge in these studies indicates that both "who" drops out and "why" these students drop out are basically known. The imperative now is to take action.

The studies indicate that the majority of dropouts come from poor, urban, inner city environments and low socioeconomic family backgrounds. More than half are male. Many come from broken homes. A majority are from minority backgrounds. Many have parents who themselves have low levels of education.

Dropouts typically are poor academic achievers. Failure, frustration, alienation, lack of self esteem, personal problems, and disinterest drive these students to skip school. First they drop behind, then they drop out.

Drug abuse, teenage pregnancy (four out of five teenage mothers leave the classroom and do not return), and the lure of work also play a significant role in the discontinuation of schooling.

Potential dropouts can be sighted: they give warnings. Failing grades and absenteeism are two of the earliest, and strongest, predictors of dropping out. Disciplinary problems and delinquent behavior are other early warning signals.

Dropping out is not caused by secondary school, but it is at this time that dropping out most often takes place. At this point, academic difficulties tend to peak and parental control tends to weaken.

Since learning is cumulative, students who have not had the advantage of a learning-supportive home enter the school system ***already*** behind. Once behind, students find it increasingly difficult to catch up. Some studies indicate that the learning deficit may not be made up even in college.

Since academic difficulty can begin as early as kindergarten and increase with each year of schooling, an early start is critical to providing the important initial learning that can keep at-risk students at their proper grade level and in school.

The Cost

The cost of dropping out to Texas is estimated at $17.12 billion in foregone income, lost tax revenue, unemployment insurance, adult training and education, and the increased cost of crime, welfare, and incarceration.

In Texas, 60% of the adults living below the poverty level, 63% of adults on welfare, and more than 90% of the prison population are individuals who did not complete high school.

High school dropouts will find the job market a difficult place. Employers consider them a poor bet. They face a particularly bleak future in an increasingly complex and demanding work arena. The U. S. Department of Labor has estimated that by 1990 three out of four jobs will require not just a high school diploma, but training *beyond* the high school level. Work and earning prospects are clearly limited for those who do not acquire basic skills.

A healthy Texas future depends on an educated and trained workforce. To achieve this, Texas students need to stay in school.

Moving to a Solution: Common Elements in Programs that Work

Dropout prevention programs that work share a number of important common elements. Programs designed to keep students in school need to incorporate these core principles.

Successful programs have ***PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND SUPPORT.*** The participation of parents in school activities is critical to keeping students in school, helping students reach higher levels of achievement and reinforcing the importance of education. Parental involvement in schooling raises both the child's ***and*** the family's educational aspirations. This is perhaps the most crucial element in effecting change.

Successful programs have ***STRONG ADMINISTRATORS AND STRONG TEACHERS.*** Students need to feel both emotionally and physically secure in order to learn. Successful administrators set clear standards, rules, and regulations. Good teachers involve and motivate students, and encourage cultural awareness of differences in students' backgrounds, needs and interests. The "invisible agenda" -- the unspoken set of values communicated by the school leadership to the student body -- stresses **order, respect, and achievement for all.**

Successful programs ***FOCUS ON THE INDIVIDUAL, BUILD SELF-ESTEEM, AND PROVIDE A SENSE OF CARING.*** Children at-risk suffer from feelings of neglect and abandonment leaving them without the vision or drive to remain in school. **Small** schools and **small** classes, designed to help the student develop positive bonds, are crucial to developing a sense of belonging and success. Individual attention and caring provide essential encouragement that can become the deciding factors in leading students to stay in school.

Successful programs ***BUILD EXPECTATIONS.*** Teachers who expect achievement will be most successful in getting achievement. Challenging courses and a relevant curriculum combined with high teacher expectations not only motivate students, but also help students build their own sense of success and direction.

Successful programs ***PROVIDE AN ARRAY OF SUPPORT SERVICES.*** At-risk students often need extra support. Services centered on health, nutrition and day care have typically been considered beyond the bounds of school responsibility. Availability of these added services is now an important part of the support network that students need to keep from falling behind appropriate grade level.

Successful programs ***INVOLVE BROAD-BASED PARTNERSHIPS.*** The job of conquering the dropout problem is simply too big for schools to do alone. Educators, businesses, parents, social agencies, and communities must join together to build successful dropout prevention and recovery initiatives.

Moving to a Solution: Model Methods that Work

There are many programs in place today that show successful results in working with at-risk students. Below are some of the approaches used by these programs that are succeeding.

STARTING EARLY: At-risk students do not have exposure to important early learning opportunities. Pre-school programs provide essential social and intellectual input for these students. An early start gives at-risk students a stronger chance to enter the classroom confidently and maintain success through the schooling years.

MENTORING: Pairing at-risk youth with other students or adults can provide both important individual attention and powerful role models. In programs where student mentors have been used, ***student tutors have been shown to gain as much from the experience as those they have taught.*** Students need positive attachments to teachers, peers, and school activities to remain committed and successful.

INTERGENERATIONAL PROGRAMS: Studies indicate that the level of parental education plays a crucial role in the academic aspirations and achievement of a child. Permanent, positive change is most apt to take place when both the child **and** the parents are involved in the learning process. It is essential to encourage academic remediation and build academic expectations in the parents as well as the children. In this way, long-term attitudes and success patterns can be changed for the at-risk student and the family.

YEAR-ROUND SCHOOLING: At-risk students not only lack opportunities for productive ways to spend their summer time, but also run the risk of forgetting much of what they have learned during the vacation months. There is a proven positive correlation between the length of time a student remains in school and reading ability. Year-round schooling opportunities for at-risk children would help to increase learning retention, provide a sense of continuity of purpose, and increase the important element of "time on task."

ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS: The traditional school format does not meet the needs of all students. Alternative programs and learning centers can offer students important options that can help prevent their leaving school. Alternative physical settings, computer-driven learning, individualized and cooperative learning strategies, and curricula designed around real-world problems are all options that add flexibility and incentive to learning.

SCHOOLS-WITHIN-SCHOOLS: School size is critical to the at-risk students. Large buildings and large classes can feel threatening. Additionally, positive social bonds--so important to students at risk--are easier to establish in a smaller, more intimate environment. Schools with large physical facilities can be made smaller and less intimidating by providing a "school-within-a-school" setting.

Moving to a Solution: The Role of Vocational Education

Vocational education is a critical and powerful *component* of dropout prevention and recovery efforts. Vocational education not only provides an alternative way to learn, but helps tie together the importance of school and the world of work. Students who drop out often fail to see the relevance between what they must learn at school and what they want for the future.

Below are vocational education program strategies that have been important elements in successful dropout prevention plans.

EXTENSIVE CAREER EXPLORATION AND JOB-SPECIFIC SKILL TRAINING: Provide at-risk students with extensive career exploration coupled with related career-education opportunities, **prior to** and during high school, as a way to enhance awareness of vocational alternatives and help crystalize interests and goals.

Additionally, ensure that at-risk students are not excluded from job-specific skill training courses. Research comparing actual dropouts with potential dropouts (students with the characteristics of a dropout who remain in school) reveals that dropouts tend to spend more time in "exploratory courses" than in job-specific skill training. Exploratory courses should be used as a **complement**, not a substitute for, job-specific skill training at the high school level.

WORK-STUDY ACTIVITIES: Work study activities have proven to give meaning to students' schooling experience. Provide a strong work-study activity program and see that it is designed to have: (1) clear and specific objectives, (2) programmatic experiences, (3) linkages with students' overall school program, (4) built-in communication between employer and school officials, and (5) specific evaluation standards.

ENTRY INTO VOCATIONAL EDUCATION: Often it is difficult for students to find time to place vocational education activities into their schedule. Review existing rules governing entry into vocational programs and ensure that the rules allow at-risk students to access vocational courses.

AWARENESS/INVOLVEMENT IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION: Students who are aware of vocational education options can take advantage of them. Schools should undertake programmatic activities to heighten at-risk students' awareness of and involvement in vocational education and related vocational activities.

Vocational education is not a panacea for preventing dropouts. However, vocational education, in combination with other educational components, can be an effective part of dropout prevention programs. Vocational education provides an important alternative method of learning that should be used.

The Mandate

The dropout problem is too urgent to be ignored. Parents, educators, and community leaders must come together with clear determination to keep students in school.

CHILDREN IN NEED: Investment Strategies for the Educationally Disadvantaged, a 1987 statement by the Research and Policy Committee of the Committee for Economic Development, captures the problem in the following passage:

> *In 1987, nearly 1 million young people will leave the nation's public schools without graduating. Most of them will be deficient in basic skills, marginally literate, and virtually unemployable. Another 700,000 will merely mark time in school and receive their diplomas but will be as deficient in meaningful skills and work habits as most dropouts.*
>
> *Currently, fewer than 50 percent of high school seniors read at levels considered adequate for carrying out even moderately complex tasks, and 80 percent have inadequate writing skills. . . .*
>
> *The nation can ill afford such an egregious waste of human resources. . . . Allowing this to continue will not only impoverish these children, it will impoverish our nation--culturally, politically, and economically."*[1]

This position paper is offered as a starting point to identify, and encourage the use of, successful approaches for reducing school dropout rates.

WE URGE THAT ALL AVENUES BE EXPLORED, THAT MODEL METHODS BE USED, AND THAT THE DROPOUT PROBLEM BE PLACED AT THE TOP OF THE TEXAS AGENDA.

---

1. Committee for Economic Development (CED), *Children In Need: Investment Strategies for the Educationally Disadvantaged* (1987), p. 3.

To request additional copies, please write or phone:

Texas Council on Vocational Education
P. O. Box 1886
Austin, Texas 78767

(512) 463-5490

SOURCES

The Dropout Dilemma: Searching for Formulas That Work

Texas Council on Vocational Education
June 1988

In developing the position statement entitled *The Dropout Dilemma: Searching for Formulas That Work*, the Council used a variety of sources as a research base. Listed below are the most important of these documents.

Sources Providing Backdrop for Paper's Overall Content/Focus

1. Andrew Hahn and Jacqueline Danzberger with Bernard Lefkowitz, *Dropouts in America: Enough is Known for Action* (Washington, D.C.: The Institute for Educational Leadership, 1987).

2. Appalachian Regional Commission, *Dropout Prevention in Appalachia: Lessons for the Nation* (Bethesda, Maryland: prepared by Campbell Communications, Inc., January 1987).

3. Arthur N. Applebee, Judith Langer, and Ira V.S. Mullis, *The Nation's Report Card: Learning to Be Literate in America* (New Jersey: National Assessment of Educational Progress, Education Testing Service, 1987).

4. Committee for Economic Development, Research & Policy Committee, *Children in Need: Investment Strategies for the Educationally Disadvantaged* (New York: 1987).

5. *House Bill No. 1010*, passed by the 70th Texas Legislature.

6. James M. Weber, "Vocational Education and Its Role in Dropout Reduction" (Columbus, Ohio: The National Center for Research in Vocational Education, *Facts and Findings*, Volume 4, No. 2, Spring, 1986).

7. Karol Gadwa, *School Dropouts, A Study and Final Report* (Lynwood, Washington: Edmonds School District, June 1983).

8. National Governors' Association, Center for Policy Research, *Jobs, Growth and Competitiveness* (Washington, D.C.: 1987).

9. OERI Urban Superintendents Network, *Dealing with Dropouts: The Urban Superintendents' Call to Action* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, November 1987).

10. Sandra Jibrell, "School Droputs: A National Dilemma" (Washington, D.C.: National Governors' Association, *Labor Notes*, Number 16, June 27, 1987).

11. The Task Force on Literacy, *Literacy as a Strategic Resource: A Challenge to Texas* (Austin, Texas: March 1987).

12. Texas Education Agency, *Alternatives to Social Promotion, Grades 7-12 (Increasing Graduation Rates)* (Austin, Texas: March 1987).

13. Texas Department of Community Affairs, Training and Employment Development Division, *Texas School Dropout Survey: A Report to the 69th Legislature* (Austin, Texas: December 31, 1986).

14. U.S. General Accounting Office, *School Dropouts: Survey of Local Programs* (Washington, D.C.: Report to Congressional Requesters, July 1987).

Sources of Facts/Figures Included in Paper

1. **Texas ranks 41st among all the states in its ability to retain students in school through graduation...** U.S. Department of Education, "U.S. High School Dropout Rates," *Austin American Statesman* (June 8, 1988), p. A18.

2. **The cost of dropping out to Texas is estimated at $17.12 billion in foregone income, lost tax revenue, unemployment insurance, adult training and education, and the increased cost of crime, welfare, and incarceration.** Texas Department of Community Affairs, *Texas School Dropout Survey: A Report to the 69th Legislature* (Austin, Texas: December 1986), p. 9.

3. **In Texas, 60% of adults living below the poverty level, 63% of adults on welfare, and more than 90%* of the prison population are individuals who do not complete high school.** The Task Force on Literacy, *Literacy as A Strategic Resource: A Challenge to Texas* (Austin, Texas: March 1987); and Lane Murray, Superintendent of Schools, Windham Independent School District, Texas Department of Corrections, testimony before *Special Joint Legislative Interim Committee on School Dropouts* (December 9, 1987).

4. **The U.S. Department of Labor has estimated that by 1990 three out of four jobs will require not just a high school diploma, but training beyond the high school level.** U.S. Assistant Secretary of Labor Roger D. Semerad, excerpt from a speech on adult literacy (April 23, 1986).

5. **...some studies indicate that the learning deficit may not be made up even in college.** Arthur N. Applebee, Judith A. Langer, and Ina V.S. Mullis, The National Assessment of Educational Progress, *The Nation's Report Card: Learning to Be Literate in America* (March 1987), p. 22.

* The Task Force on Literacy, in its report, cited 85% of the Texas prison population as having not completed high school. Dr. Lane Murray, Superintendent of the Texas Department of Corrections School System, updated this figure to 90% in her testimony to the Special Joint Legislative Interim Committee on School Dropouts.